

NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN

BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5780
EDWARD CONLEY/TOKYO

MAY 1, 1978

FOCUS: TAKEO FUKUDA

ANNCR:

JAPAN'S PRIME MINISTER, TAKEO FUKUDA, IS IN THE UNITED STATES FOR TALKS ON WEDNESDAY (MAY 3) WITH PRESIDENT CARTER. VOA'S TOKYO CORRESPONDENT EDWARD CONLEY FILED THIS REPORT ON THE JAPANESE LEADER.

VOICE:

DURING THE SIXTEEN MONTHS HE HAS SERVED AS JAPAN'S PRIME MINISTER, TAKEO FUKUDA HAS BEEN A MAN ON THE MOVE TRYING TO SOLVE PROBLEMS LEFT OVER BY HIS PREDECESSORS AND ALSO TRYING TO PUT HIS OWN IMPRINT ON JAPANESE DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICIES. IN NINETEEN SEVENTY-SEVEN HE MET WITH PRESIDENT CARTER IN WASHINGTON AND ATTENDED THE INDUSTRIALIZED NATIONS ECONOMIC SUMMIT IN LONDON. HE ALSO MADE AN EXTENSIVE TOUR OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS INVOKING A NEW DOCTRINE OF JAPANESE COOPERATION AND ASSISTANCE OF ITS ASIAN NEIGHBORS.

SEVENTY THREE YEAR OLD MISTER FUKUDA, AFTER A BRILLIANT CAREER AS GOVERNMENT BUREAUCRAT, TURNED POLITICIAN. AND AFTER TWO UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPTS TO BECOME PRIME MINISTER, HE FINALLY ACHIEVED HIS GOAL IN DECEMBER NINETEEN SEVENTY SIX. BUT WITH THE JOB CAME PROBLEMS -- DOMESTIC RECESSION, THE STILL PENDING JAPAN-CHINA PEACE TREATY AND INTERNATIONAL CRITICISM OF JAPAN'S TRADE POLICIES. ALL OF THOSE PROBLEMS STILL REMAIN, ALTHOUGH THE FUKUDA GOVERNMENT HAS INITIATED STEPS TO RESOLVE THEM.

LAST NOVEMBER, IN THE FACE OF INTERNATIONAL CRITICISM AND A DROP IN POPULARITY AT HOME, THE PRIME MINISTER RESHUFFLED HIS CABINET WITH AN EMPHASIS ON ECONOMICS. HE SAYS JAPAN'S ECONOMIC

PROBLEMS WILL BE EASED DRAMATICALLY DURING THE CURRENT FISCAL YEAR.

ON THE SINO-JAPANESE PEACE TREATY PRIME MINISTER FUKUDA SAYS HE FAVORS A RESUMPTION OF NEGOTIATIONS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. BUT HE HAS HELD UP TREATY TALKS WITH PEKING BECAUSE OF PRO-TAIWAN OPPOSITION WITHIN HIS OWN PARTY. MISTER FUKUDA SAYS HE'LL MAKE A DECISION ON THE SINO-JAPANESE TREATY TALKS WHEN HE RETURNS HOME FROM HIS PRESENT WASHINGTON VISIT.

WITH HIS DOMESTIC POPULARITY ON THE WANE, THE PRIME MINISTER NEEDS SOME BREAKTHROUGH SOON TO BOOST HIS IMAGE. HIS RULING LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY MEETS IN DECEMBER TO ELECT ITS PRESIDENT, AND THE PRESIDENT OF THE LDP AUTOMATICALLY BECOMES JAPAN'S PRIME MINISTER.

TAKEO FUKUDA, THE MAN WHO WORKED SO HARD TO BECOME JAPAN'S THIRTEENTH POST WAR PRIME MINISTER, SAYS HE HASN'T DECIDED YET WHETHER HE'LL RUN FOR HIS PARTY'S PRESIDENCY AGAIN. BUT UNLESS HIS PROGRAMS TO OVERCOME MAJOR PROBLEMS BEAR FRUIT, MISTER FUKUDA MIGHT FIND THE GOING DIFFICULT TO MAINTAIN HIS PARTY POST AND HIS JOB AS JAPAN'S PRIME MINISTER. THAT IS, IF SOMEONE WITHIN HIS PARTY IS WILLING TO CHALLENGE HIM AND BE BURDENED WITH THE SAME PROBLEMS THAT EVEN THE EXPERIENCED MISTER FUKUDA FINDS DIFFICULT TO RESOLVE.

-0-

JS/RTD